United Nations E/CN.6/2003/NGO/14

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
14 January 2003

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Forty-seventh session
3-14 March 2003
Item 3 (c) (ii) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's human rights and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

Statement submitted by the Women's National Commission, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The Women's National Commission (WNC) is an independent body providing advice on women to the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. WNC has over 230 partner organizations — women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, political parties, faith organizations and women's sections of other NGOs — representing several million women throughout the United Kingdom. WNC also includes and works with other international women's organizations worldwide.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and all human rights conventions decry violence against women, which is one of the two themes of the forty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

* E/CN.6/2003/1.

03-21201 (E) 030203

Violence against women and girls is deeply ingrained throughout the world, manifesting itself in the most private to the most public arenas. States use rape as a tool of war and sexual abuse of all kinds as a means of torture and humiliation. Men pursue, trap and rape women and girls in cities, in rural areas, in deserts and on mountainsides, crossing boundaries of culture, religion, region, class and caste; male relatives — most commonly husbands and sexual partners, but also fathers, uncles and brothers — abuse, maim and murder their wives, daughters, nieces and sisters. Widows suffer further abuse and violence at the hands of male in-laws. Workplaces can be sites of daily sexual harassment and abuse, as can public transport systems, hospitals, schools and corporations. The media broadcast and print images of women that continually promote their sexuality and downplay their qualities as workers, professionals and leaders, not to mention their pivotal positions in their families as the childbearers, major nurturers and carers.

Key facts

- At least one in five of the world's female population has been physically or sexually abused by a man or men at some time in her life. Many, including pregnant women and young girls, are subject to severe, sustained or repeated attacks (World Health Organization (WHO), 1997).
- Worldwide it has been estimated that violence against women is as serious a cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age as cancer, and a greater cause of ill health than traffic accidents and malaria combined (World Bank, 1993).
- In every country where reliable, large-scale studies have been conducted, results indicate that at least 10 per cent and usually much greater proportions of women report that they have been physically abused by an intimate partner during their lifetime (WHO, 2000).
- Population-based studies report that between 12 and 25 per cent of women have experienced attempted or completed forced sex by an intimate partner or ex-partner at some time in their lives (WHO, 2000).
- Interpersonal violence was the tenth leading cause of death for women 15 to 44 years of age in 1998 (WHO, 2000).
- Forced prostitution, trafficking for sex and sex tourism appear to be growing. Existing data and statistical sources on trafficking of women and children estimated 500,000 women entering the European Union in 1995 (WHO, 2000).

Most studies on violence against women indicate that:

- The perpetrators of violence against women are almost exclusively men
- Women are at greatest risk of violence from men they know
- Women and girls are the most frequent victims of violence within the family and between intimate partners
- Physical abuse in intimate relationships is almost always accompanied by severe psychological and verbal abuse

- Social institutions, including criminal justice systems put in place to protect citizens, too often blame or ignore battered women and those subject to rape (WHO, 2000)

The United Kingdom is a plural society made up of many ethnicities and of people holding a wide range of belief systems. Women in the United Kingdom, like their sisters elsewhere in the world, also face physical, sexual and psychological violence on a daily basis. This experience is exacerbated among women with a disability and lesbians.

We call upon Governments everywhere to institute the necessary programmes and monitor their effectiveness, as follows.

Nationally

- Zero tolerance of all forms of violence against women
- An effective legal framework that protects the safety and rights of abused women and children and that holds perpetrators accountable for their behaviour
- An end to the consideration of domestic violence as a private matter
- The provision of specialist services, such as safe shelters and other community support and advocacy services offering physical, emotional and practical care to abused women and children, including a well-resourced network of rape crisis lines and centres to give support to women survivors of sexual violence, all with access to health care
- Legal systems that condemn and punish acts of violence such as so-called honour crimes and crimes against widows who may be held responsible for the death of their husbands and that forbid traditional harmful practices of all kinds
- Resources and support for NGOs working to eradicate violence against women
- Encouragement and support for public service broadcasting that:
  - Promotes cultural attitudes condemning gender-based violence
  - Promotes tolerance and understanding
  - Shows images of women and girls that are neither sexualized nor pornographic
- Programmes in schools from the earliest ages that promote respect and equality for women of all ages and status and decry all forms of violence against women
- Training for military and police personnel and for all peacekeeping forces forbidding gender-based violence in all circumstances
- Gender awareness for judges, all court professionals and traditional court elders
- Systems to monitor and bring those responsible for gender-based violence against women to account

Regionally and globally

- Support for international NGOs working to eradicate violence against women
- Training for military and police personnel and for all peacekeeping forces forbidding gender-based violence in all circumstances
- Gender awareness for judges, all court professionals and personnel of the International Criminal Court and other regional and global institutions
- Financial and other support for the United Nations and regional systems to monitor and bring Governments responsible for tolerating and failing to eradicate gender-based violence against women to account
- Full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) involving women in helping to reduce conflict and violence

References

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